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ABSTRACT

Most colleges and high schools in states served by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) have reports each year on how high school graduates perform as college freshmen. These reports can help college faculty and high school teachers work together to improve student learning in college preparatory courses, and the information in the reports can help students and parents see the value of coursework preparing students for college. SREB states differ in their method of gathering and reporting information, the kind of information they report, and the level of detail in the reports. The systems do have some things in common. Most reports show how many high school graduates enroll in college and how the college attendance patterns of graduates from one high school compare with those of graduates from other schools statewide. Reports also indicate how well high school graduates are prepared and how many have advanced standing or need remedial work. Schools can use the information to strengthen connections between high schools and colleges and to increase awareness of what students should know and be able to do. This paper describes several examples of the kinds of reports states provide, focusing on the program in Oklahoma, which goes beyond basic reporting to connect planning and academic and career guidance with instructional support for students and professional development for teachers. The example of Oklahoma shows how it is possible to use information about high school graduates as a steppingstone to more effective partnerships and programs to improve students' preparation for college. (SLD)

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SREB

Reporting on College Readiness:

Information that connects colleges and schools

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COLLEGE READINESS SERIES

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This college readiness series report was prepared by Joseph D. Creech, director of educational policies, and was funded in part by the United States Department of Education.

Reporting on College Readiness

We need better connections among schools and colleges to prepare students for college. We know what is necessary for students to be prepared for success in college:

- Begin early. Encourage students in the middle grades to begin planning for college, prepare them for challenging courses in high school and monitor their progress through high school.
- Guide high school students into courses that will prepare them for college. Develop and deliver a rigorous core of college-preparatory courses that are linked to introductory college courses.
- Bring together college and high school faculties to improve the links between high school courses and introductory college courses.
- Help high school students and their parents understand and complete the admissions and financial-aid processes.
- Provide information that helps schools and colleges work together to accomplish these tasks.

Most colleges and high schools in SREB states have reports every year on how high school graduates perform as college freshmen. If these reports are used, they can help college faculty and high school teachers work together to improve student learning in college-preparatory courses in English, mathematics, social studies and science. The information in these reports about college freshmen demonstrates to students and their parents the kind of coursework that prepares high school students for college. The reports can be improved to be more readily useful, and they are too valuable not to get greater use than is now the case in many states.

Improving connections among state and federal initiatives that aim to prepare students better for college is important and begins with establishing what students should know and be able to do to succeed in college. By reporting back to high schools on the performance of their graduates, colleges give schools, students and parents, and state leaders a perspective on who is prepared for college.

This is the first in a series on improving connections among policies and initiatives to prepare students better for college. The message is clear. Most states have important information provided through college-to-school reporting systems; states, colleges and universities, and schools need to put this information to better use.

Mark Musick
President

Reporting on College Readiness:

Information that connects colleges and schools

Do you know...?

- How many high school graduates in your district enroll in colleges and universities in your state?
- How many of these graduates completed a core of college-preparatory courses in English, mathematics, sciences, social studies, foreign languages and the arts?
- Do college freshmen who completed core college-preparatory courses at high schools in your district earn more credits and better grades than college freshmen who did not complete the core courses?
- How many college freshmen from high schools in your district take remedial courses in English or mathematics? How many earn advanced standing or take advanced college-level courses during their first term in college?
- How do the high school grade-point averages and scores on college admissions tests of college freshmen from high schools in your district compare with those of college freshmen from other high schools? How do the high school grades of college freshmen from high schools in your district compare with their grades as college freshmen?
- How many college freshmen from high schools in your district successfully complete their first year of college? How many return for their second year? How many graduate from college?

Most of these questions are answered by colleges' reports to high schools on the performance of their graduates. In nearly every SREB state, high schools receive these reports from most — if not all — public colleges. In some states, independent colleges and universities also provide such reports. Alabama, Mississippi and Virginia do not have statewide procedures for college-to-school reporting. The University of Alabama System reports to high schools on students who enter its institutions, but information is not available for students at any other college or university in Alabama.

The Tennessee Board of Regents provides information on high school graduates' performance to individual high schools and systems on request. Florida and Texas report on high school graduates' performance on tests used to determine whether they need to take remedial courses.

Reporting to high schools on their graduates' performance in college is relatively straightforward. Many institutions for years have provided informal reports through the college admissions process. College admissions officers tell principals, counselors, prospective students and parents how high school graduates with different levels of preparation perform in the first year of college. Principals and counselors can use that information to examine their college-preparatory and guidance programs and to show students and parents how to prepare for success in college.

Statewide college-to-school reports allow each high school to compare its graduates' preparation and performance with those of graduates of other high schools. The information provides clues about how high school courses match up with entry-level courses in college. Some reporting systems are more detailed than others, but even the simplest report answers some key questions that teachers, principals, school board members, parents and students should ask.

SREB states differ in their methods of gathering and reporting information, the kind of information they report, and the level of detail in the reports. Even so, the systems have some elements in common, including college course placement and information on freshman performance.

What do college readiness reports show?

These reports show:

- how many high school graduates enroll in state colleges and universities and which colleges and universities they attend;
- how college attendance patterns of graduates from one high school compare with those of graduates from other high schools statewide;
- how well high school graduates are prepared for college-level courses —
- how many graduates need college remedial courses in English and mathematics;
- how many graduates earn advanced standing;
- how performance in high school English and mathematics courses compares with performance in college-level English and mathematics courses;

- how high school graduates' grades in high school and scores on college admissions tests compares with their grades in college; and
- how many high school graduates enter college, perform satisfactorily in their first year, continue and graduate.

Excerpt from University of North Carolina Freshmen Performance Report:

This table illustrates how the University of North Carolina reports to high schools about placement into entry-level college courses. This summary is particularly interesting because it shows that 26 percent of entering freshmen from North Carolina public high schools were recommended for calculus or other high-level mathematics, while about 18 percent were recommended for remedial mathematics. The percentage recommended for advanced placement in English was twice the percentage recommended for remedial English. In addition to the summary shown here, the University of North Carolina reports separately for each of its 16 campuses. High schools can see where their graduates have gone to college and how they are placed — both throughout the university system and by campus.

Initial course-placement recommendations

Percent in:	
Advanced placement in English	11.4 %
Regular Freshman English	81.9
Remedial English	5.7
Calculus or Above	26.3
College Algebra	34.2
Other college-level Math	20.4
Remedial Math	17.6

How can the information be used?

- ***The information can be used to strengthen connections between high schools and colleges and to increase awareness of what students should know and be able to do to succeed in college.*** The information can:
  - provide a basis for high school and college faculties to discuss what students need to know and be able to do to be prepared for college-level work;
  - help college faculty better understand what high school students are learning in college-preparatory courses and help high school faculty better understand what colleges expect entering freshmen to know and be able to do;
  - demonstrate to students and parents that success in college depends on what students do in high school and that choices about courses and performance in those courses help determine where students can go to college; and
  - focus attention on the effectiveness of college-preparatory courses, the adequacy of the high school guidance and advisement process, and the appropriateness of requirements and processes for admission to colleges.
- ***The information can be used to assess the influence of high school grades, course-taking patterns and scores on college admissions tests on the college performance of graduates from high schools throughout the state.*** The information can help identify schools and school systems in which the curricula need to be aligned better with entry-level college courses. For example, in West Virginia the percentages of students who need to take remedial mathematics range from 10 percent in one district to 54 percent in another. In Arkansas, the feedback report revealed that many college freshmen had not taken the core college-preparatory courses in high school. That information led to the creation of a scholarship program that rewarded students who took the core courses. The report also showed that 35 percent of those who took the core courses needed remedial mathematics in college. As a result, Arkansas developed and implemented a National Science Foundation project to provide math and science teachers with professional development.
- ***The information can be used to track the progress of schools and colleges in preparing students better for college.*** Measures of school performance can be based on the percentages of high school graduates who go to college, who complete the high school courses required for admission, who take remedial courses and who earn advanced placement or take advanced courses in their first year of college. The information also can be used to assess the opportunities offered by a state's colleges and universities and the effectiveness of colleges' efforts to serve students who need remedial courses.

Excerpt from University System of Georgia High School Feedback Data Summary

The following information was excerpted from the University System of Georgia's High School Feedback Data Summary for 1998 Georgia high school graduates. It illustrates information related to high school course-taking and readiness for college-level courses. The numbers and percentages shown are for all freshmen entering public two- or four-year colleges in the University System of Georgia. This information shows that 75 percent of students who completed the University System's recommended college-preparatory curriculum were not required to take remedial (learning support) courses. Of those students who did not complete the recommended college-preparatory curriculum, 71 percent had to take remedial (learning support) courses.

Percent in Learning Support (remedial/developmental course) by Completion of University System of Georgia College-Preparatory Curriculum

Learning Support Status	Percent of Those Who Completed Recommended Curriculum	Percent of Those Who Did Not Complete Recommended Curriculum
Learning Support Required: Students below minimums set by the university system	15	61
Learning Support Required: Students below minimums set by individual institutions	10	10
No Learning Support: Regular Freshmen	75	29

What are the limitations of the reports?

College-to-school reports do not provide all of the information a school needs to assess thoroughly its college-preparatory curriculum. Some school leaders say that the reports provide too little information about high school coursework and course-taking patterns. One reason for the reports' limitations is the lack of connections among systems that collect information on high school students' performance and systems that collect information on college students' performance.

The reports usually do not provide information on individual students. Without such information, high schools have difficulty checking which courses or programs of study their graduates completed in high school. Some reporting systems allow high schools to obtain additional information through follow-up studies or research programs. For example, the University System of Georgia's Cooperative Instructional Improvement Research Project provides participating high schools with information on individual students. Two-thirds of Georgia high schools (201 of 306) participated in the research project in 2000. The research project enables principals and teachers to analyze in more detail which courses students took in high school and how they performed in college.

Another problem is that colleges and universities use different measures and procedures for placing students in remedial, regular and advanced courses. The variations among institutions' entrance requirements and criteria to determine who needs remedial courses lead to confusion in interpreting the results. For example, until 1999 the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia reported to high schools on the performance of each high school's graduates as first-time freshmen at Virginia's public colleges and universities. The reports consisted of four tables that summarized academic performance; remedial course enrollments; numbers and percentages of students who returned for the second term; and grade-point averages and credit-hours. The reports were discontinued, largely because of the variation in institutional policies that determined placement into entry-level college courses and remedial courses. Whether a student took a remedial course appeared to depend more on which institution he or she attended than on a particular standard of preparation. The reports spotlighted the lack of agreement among a state's colleges and universities about what is college-level work. That lack of agreement resulted in high schools' confusion about what is necessary to prepare students for college-level work. In this case, "preparation for college" really meant "preparations for colleges."

In most SREB states there is little follow-up on how individual schools and school systems use the information in the reports. Key people in the schools and colleges sometimes do not know the information exists. States need to bring college and school faculties and administrators together to review the reports and determine how to improve the links between preparation for college and performance in college. Without leadership to help interpret and use the information in the reports, college-to-school reports will continue to be underused.

College-to-School Reporting, SREB states

Information reported	Alabama[1]	Arkansas	Delaware	Florida	Georgia	Kentucky
Number and/or percentage of high school graduates attending college	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
High school graduates who applied, were accepted and enrolled	✓	✓			✓	✓
Scores on college admissions tests scores	✓	✓			✓	✓
Scores on college placement tests scores	✓	✓		✓	✓	
High school courses taken (recommended college-preparatory core completed/not completed)		✓			✓	✓
High school grade-point averages/ class ranks		✓			✓	✓
Number/percentage enrolled in college remedial courses	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Number receiving advanced placement/enrolling in advanced courses	✓					
Performance in freshman year						
Credit-hours attempted	✓	✓			✓	✓
Credit-hours earned	✓	✓			✓	✓
Grade-point averages	✓	✓			✓	✓
Grades in specific entry-level courses	✓					
College persistence and graduation rates						
Percent who return for second semester and/or percent who return for second year		✓				✓[2]
College graduation rates						

[1] The University of Alabama System reports on students entering one of its institutions. There is no report for all institutions in the state.

[2] South Carolina reports the number of college courses that were passed or failed or that received no credit as well as the percentage of college courses pa

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isiana	Maryland	Mississippi	N. Carolina	Oklahoma	S. Carolina	Tennessee	Texas	Virginia	West Virginia
✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
✓	✓		✓	✓		✓			✓
						✓	✓		✓
	✓		✓	✓		✓			✓
			✓	✓		✓			✓
✓	✓		✓	✓		✓			✓
			✓						
			✓	✓	✓½	✓			✓
			✓	✓	✓½	✓			✓
	✓		✓	✓	✓½	✓			✓
	✓		✓		✓½				
✓			✓	✓		✓			✓
			✓						

d by subject area.

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Oklahoma program combines many key factors

Oklahoma established a program that goes beyond the basic reporting of college admissions, college-going rates, placement into remedial courses and freshman performance. Funded by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education and administered by ACT, the Educational Planning and Assessment System (EPAS) is a voluntary program that assesses the academic skills and career interests of Oklahoma's eighth- and 10th-graders. The program began in 1993 with four pilot sites and now serves 397 public school districts and private schools — about 90 percent of Oklahoma's eighth- and 10th-graders.

The EPAS program connects planning, academic and career guidance, instructional support for students, and professional development for teachers. It also provides a framework for cooperative school/college/community activities to prepare students better for college and work. The EPAS program is the foundation upon which the Oklahoma Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) initiative is built. The federally funded GEAR UP initiatives encourage partnerships among colleges, middle schools and community organizations in low-income communities. These programs provide comprehensive services — including mentoring, tutoring and counseling — to students as they progress from middle school through high school and into college. The aim is to increase college-going rates among low-income youths by informing students and parents about college and financial aid and by encouraging students to take rigorous academic courses in middle school and high school.

The results of the EPAS program help students and their parents, teachers and guidance counselors plan together for postsecondary education. The results also are used in revising school curricula and in providing individual counseling and instruction. The program helps teachers and school administrators improve their schools' educational offerings; it provides information to guide statewide efforts to improve students' preparation for college.

To ensure that the information would be both useful and used, the assessments in the program were compared with Oklahoma's curriculum standards for grades seven through 12. A 1999 study found that "there appears to be a very good match" between the EPAS curriculum-based assessments and the Oklahoma Priority Academic Student Skills for Language Arts, Mathematics and Science. However, the thinking and reasoning skills in those standards do not connect to those that colleges expect entering students to have, particularly in mathematics and science. Oklahoma's GEAR UP and EPAS projects enable its colleges and universities to work directly with schools to incorporate those higher-order skills into the high school curricula.

Another study is under way to determine how the ACT assessments used in EPAS match with Oklahoma's content standards.

Other states need to consider developing similar systems, through which schools and colleges can work together to:

- establish clear learning standards that better prepare students for further education and work;
- identify the gaps between curricula in schools and adequate preparation for college;
- assess student performance and progress toward college readiness, beginning when students are in the middle grades; and
- use results of assessments to refine and improve instruction and guidance.

How can the information in college-to-school reports be utilized better?

Information provided through college-to-school reporting systems is among the most important information available to help colleges and schools improve students' preparation for college. This valuable information also is some of the most under-utilized information. What can be done to make better use of information from college-to-school reports?

1. Provide the information in a clear, useful format. Make the tables simple and easy to read.
2. Include a page that summarizes system- or state-level information. Highlight key information about the percentage of high school graduates who enroll and their preparation and performance.
3. Provide high schools with information on individual students and analyze in more detail which courses students completed and how they performed in college.
4. Make sure the reports get to the people who are most likely to ask more questions about why the schools' graduates perform as they do in college.
5. Develop and implement clear plans for colleges to work directly with middle and high schools in their geographic areas. The plans should include conferences with teams of faculty and administrators from schools and colleges to analyze the information in the reports and to develop strategies for preparing students better for college.

6. Find ways to get information about performance in particular college subjects (such as English or mathematics) to high school and college teachers of those subjects. College-to-school reporting systems need to bring together those who teach the same subjects (such as English, mathematics or science) in middle schools, high schools and colleges to develop ways to improve instruction and student achievement. Notifying middle school teachers of what will be expected of students in high school can help to align curricula in the middle grades and high school.

7. Provide summaries of the reports to school boards, community leaders, legislators and other policy-makers.

8. Incorporate appropriate information (such as college-going rates and percentages of high school graduates in advanced college courses and in remedial courses) from college-to-school reports into accountability reports for schools and colleges.

College-to-school feedback can be used as hard evidence in state programs to help middle school and high school students and their parents understand the knowledge and skills needed to prepare for college. How high school graduates perform as college freshmen is a better measure of the effectiveness of college preparation than are scores on admissions tests alone.

The information in the reports can raise concerns because it shines a light on problems. As Oklahoma has shown, it is possible to move beyond this stage and use the information as a steppingstone to more effective partnerships and programs to improve students' preparation for college. Information from college-to-school reports can lead to programs that create early awareness of what preparation is necessary for success in college. The information can be used to identify the need for and to monitor the effectiveness of state and federal programs (such as the federal Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs initiative).

Questions state leaders need to ask:

- Do college-to-school reporting systems that collect information on student performance in schools and colleges provide data that give insights into the links between preparation for college and success in college?
- What are colleges and universities doing to help school personnel analyze and use the information in college-to-school reports for planning curricula, counseling and advising students, and improving instruction in college-preparatory courses?
- Do the college-to-school reporting systems provide information that shows the impact of policies that aim to improve students' preparation for college through challenging curricula, quality instruction and improved guidance and counseling programs in schools?
- Do state efforts to improve teacher preparation use these reports to understand better and change the knowledge and skills required of high school teachers?
- Is the information from college-to-school reporting utilized fully to ensure that state-funded and federally-funded programs to prepare students better for college are directed toward low-performing schools and districts?

Selected statewide college-to-school reporting systems

The Florida Readiness for College Report provides schools and school districts with information on how high school graduates perform on college placement tests. The reports show how many high school graduates become degree-seeking students at public two- and four-year colleges and universities; how many are tested in mathematics, reading and writing; and how many are considered "ready" for college-level work. There is no systematic follow-up beyond the performance on the placement tests.

The University System of Georgia Feedback Report includes students at public two-year colleges as well as at public four-year colleges in the system. It provides schools with information on which colleges and universities their graduates attend and shows the total number of the school's graduates enrolled in colleges in the system. It reports high school grade-point averages as calculated by colleges or universities,

average SAT scores, and average grade-point averages and number of college credits earned in the freshman year. The feedback report indicates how many high school graduates entering the University System of Georgia completed the college-preparatory curriculum prescribed by the University System. Each school's report shows data from the freshman year (college grade-point averages, average numbers of college credits earned, and numbers requiring remedial courses) by high school grade-point averages, average SAT scores, and college-preparatory curricula (completed or not completed). The report also describes how entering students are screened to determine whether they must take remedial courses.

These aggregate reports do not include information on individual students, but the University System provides such information to high schools that participate in the Cooperative Instructional Improvement Research Project. Two-thirds of Georgia high schools (201 of 306) participated in the research project in 2000. By participating in the research project, principals and teachers can analyze in more detail what courses students took in high school, whether they took college-preparatory courses as high school seniors, what grades they made in those courses and how their college performance compares with their performance in high school.

The Kentucky High School Feedback Report is the result of a coordinated effort by Kentucky's public and independent colleges and universities, the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education and ACT Inc. The report for each high school consists of two sections: one on college enrollment and attendance patterns and one on college performance.

The first section provides enrollment data on graduates from the individual high school, from all high schools in the education region in which that high school is located, and from all high schools in the state. It includes the percentage of graduates who go to college, the percentage who continue in college after one semester, and the percentages who seek associate's and bachelor's degrees. This section also lists the five colleges and universities attended by the most graduates and the numbers of high school graduates enrolled in different types of colleges and universities (public two- or four-year; independent two- or four-year).

The second section covers college performance — the percentages of students who take advanced or remedial English or mathematics courses in college; average grades for students in college English and mathematics courses; overall college grade-point averages; and percentages of students with grade-point averages above 2.0 and above 3.0. The section also includes the percentages of high school graduates who entered college and continued for a second semester; average composite ACT scores; average college credits attempted and earned; and grade-point averages by average ACT scores.

The Louisiana First-time Freshmen Report, issued annually by the Department of Education, provides information on the performance of first-time college freshmen who graduated from Louisiana high schools and enrolled full time at Louisiana colleges and universities. Each high school, school district and parish receives a report on how many of its graduates enrolled in public or private colleges or universities in Louisiana; what percentage of its graduates took remedial courses in English, mathematics or reading at the institutions in which they enrolled; and how many of its students who took remedial courses completed the first year in good standing, compared with the number of students who did not take remedial courses and completed the first year successfully. Each Louisiana college and university receives a similar report showing the schools from which its entering freshmen graduated and their performance.

The Maryland Higher Education Commission's Student Outcome and Achievement Report to high schools combines information from The College Board (which administers the SAT) and the American College Testing Program (ACT) with information from public and independent two- and four-year colleges and universities in Maryland. The report provides information on students who graduated from Maryland high schools and enrolled at Maryland colleges or universities in the fall. The report shows the differences between the freshman-year performance of students who completed college-preparatory curricula in high school and those who did not; identifies factors that best predict first-year performance in college; and shows trends in the data over four years.

The University of North Carolina High School Feedback Report comprises three reports: a report on acceptance rates and enrollment rates by race and gender (Freshmen Application Report); a report on the freshman-year performance of recent high school graduates (Freshmen Performance Report); and a report on retention, graduation and persistence of first-time freshmen that provides three- and five-year follow-ups on students who entered UNC institutions in the fall after high school graduation (Retention, Graduation and Persistence Report). The reports' content and format follow recommendations made by a representative group of superintendents of North Carolina public schools. The reports allow individual high schools to compare themselves with other schools in their districts and throughout the state.

The Freshmen Performance Report includes information on academic status, initial course placements and enrollments, average credit-hours earned, average grades in college-level courses, average class ranks in high school, and average scores on admissions tests.

The South Carolina College Readiness Report combines information on graduates of all high schools in the state. Every public college and university in South Carolina must send each high school the college transcripts for that high school's graduates who are enrolled there. Each high school compiles a report on the performance of its graduates who are freshmen in college. These reports are submitted to the South Carolina Department of Education, which produces a statewide report.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Annual Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP) Report on Student Performance analyzes student performance on the state's test to determine college readiness. Students entering Texas public colleges and universities must take the test, and the annual report on their performance provides a state-level analysis of the results. It also breaks down the results by county, school district and high school. The report includes the total number of high school graduates; the number and percentage of graduates who took the TASP test or an alternative test; the percentage of test-takers who passed all three parts (reading, mathematics and writing) of the TASP test or an alternative test on the first attempt; and the percentages of test-takers who passed the individual sections of the test on the first attempt. The report shows schools how many of their graduates were considered ready for college-level work, but it does not provide information on credits or grades earned by college freshmen.

College Freshman Success Reports by ACT Inc. collect information on the performance of high school graduates in Arkansas and West Virginia. ACT Inc. gives this information to the Arkansas Department of Higher Education and the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission. High schools in these two states receive reports on their graduates who took the ACT assessment and enrolled at public colleges or universities in their home states. The reports consist of six tables that show the credit-hours attempted and earned; grade-point averages by ACT composite scores; numbers of graduates who took remedial courses in reading, English, writing and mathematics; and numbers of students who completed the freshman year. The reports show the information for students who completed college-preparatory curricula and for those who did not. Each state's report also provides information for the state as a whole and for each institution.